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For Immediate Release
July 20, 2015

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Baesler Lauds Senate Approval Of New Federal Education Law

BISMARCK, N.D. – North Dakota Superintendent of Public Instruction Kirsten Baesler on Thursday praised the U.S. Senate's vote to approve a new version of the No Child Left Behind federal education law.

Baesler has been a strong advocate for a new version, called a "reauthorization," of the present law. The new law needs to give state and local school administrators more freedom to administer education programs, Baesler said, adding that she believes its final version will accomplish that goal.

"Our local school districts want flexibility and discretion to operate as they know best for our students," Baesler said. A new version of the federal education law, she said, should "allow our local schools to do what they do best. It should return the control back to our local schools to make more decisions about what's best for our students in our schools across the state."

Baesler is appointing a task force to study North Dakota's student assessment system and what alternative options may be available to measure student progress. Federal law requires some statewide testing, and Baesler said she hopes a new federal education law will give states more latitude in administering student assessments, while making sure North Dakota students are making appropriate progress in school.

"If this bill becomes law, when our assessment task force meets, we will be able to make recommendations for the state of North Dakota that are much broader in scope. We won't be so confined by the current, overly restrictive federal law," Baesler said. "We as a state can determine what's best for assessment strategy for our students in North Dakota."

"A new law provides the opportunity for our local school districts to have a federal policy on education that is less intrusive," Baesler continued. "I'm very pleased that we've come this far."

The federal law known as No Child Left Behind is the latest reauthorization of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

The ESEA became law in 1965. Congress approved its most recent version in 2001, which became known as No Child Left Behind. Lawmakers were scheduled to approve a new version of the law in 2007, but that has never happened.

The U.S. Senate voted 81-17 on Thursday to approve its new version of No Child Left Behind. The Senate bill is S. 1177, the Every Child Achieves Act. The House voted 218-213 on July 8 to approve its own version, H.R. 5, which is called the Student Success Act.

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Senate and House leaders are expected next week to appoint members of a conference committee from the two chambers to negotiate a final version of the bill.

“This reauthorization is very important to the work that we’re going to do in North Dakota. Both bills return so much authority and decision-making flexibility back to the states, and gives us a stable federal policy that recognizes the states’ rights to set their accountability and their assessments as they so choose,” Baesler said. “With the passage of this, I believe it provides the Department of Public Instruction greater opportunity to do what we know is best for our students in North Dakota.”

As the Senate has debated the legislation in recent days, Baesler has been in touch with North Dakota’s U.S. senators, John Hoeven and Heidi Heitkamp, about the bill and proposed changes to it.

“I’d like to thank Senators Hoeven and Heitkamp and Congressman Cramer for their work in getting this passed,” Baesler said. “This last week, there has been a great deal of communication between the senators’ offices and the Department of Public Instruction on what’s best for North Dakota. They have worked with us and kept in mind what is best for North Dakota as amendments were considered, and that speaks to the great working relationship among our leaders that we have in North Dakota.”

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